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Argument marking and hierarchy effects: why Jivaroan is a special case



Speaker

Martin Kohlberger (Leiden University/JCU) and Simon Overall (JCU)

Venue

TBA

Date

Friday, 5 September, 2014 - 15:30 to 17:00

Talk sponsored by AIATSIS

NB: The talk will be held in Mabo Room, AIATSIS, Lawson Crescent, Acton Peninsula, Canberra

Differential object marking (DOM) has been described as a phenomenon by which a language marks case overtly on some direct objects but not on others depending on the semantic and pragmatic features of the object (Bossong 1985, 1991; Aissen 2003). Whether an object receives marking has typically been claimed to depend on where it stands on an animacy or definiteness hierarchy, with objects at the top of the hierarchy favouring overt marking (ibid.). This talk presents an interesting case of DOM found in Jivaroan languages and argues against an abstract hierarchical approach to explaining it.

Five closely related Jivaroan languages are spoken in the western Amazon basin in Ecuador and Peru. Morphologically they are suffixing and agglutinating and show both head and dependent marking. Unmarked constituent order is predicate-final, and clause-chaining is pervasive. Grammatical relations centre on Subject and Object, and basically follow accusative alignment. These are manifested through morphological coding (case-marking and verbal indexing) and syntactic behaviour (control of switch-reference and nominalization). Importantly, Jivaroan languages show symmetrical objects: coding properties of all objects (notional direct and indirect objects as well as those added by applicative derivation) are identical, and their syntactic behaviours are similarly symmetrical.

Jivaroan languages exhibit a scenario-conditioned split in accusative case marking (described by Overall 2007 for Aguaruna, and see Witzlack-Makarevich 2011 §8.6 for discussion), whereby third person objects are only marked for accusative case if the subject of the verb is first person singular or third person, but remain unmarked if the subject is first person plural or second person. The following minimal pairs are from Shiwiar.

- | | |
|-------------------|--------------------|
| <i>numi-n</i> | <i>atfi-a-ha-i</i> |
| stick-acc | grab-impfv-1sg-dec |
| 'I grab a stick.' | |

2. *numi atfi-a-mi-i*

stick grab-impfv-**2sg**-dec

'You grab a stick.'

3. *aintsu-n hi-a-wa-i*

person-**acc** see-impfv-**3sg**-dec

'He sees the person.'

4. *aintsu hi-a-hi-i*

person see-impfv-**1pl**-dec

'We see the person.'

This is unlike canonical DOM (as discussed above) in two respects. Firstly, the conditioning is based entirely on the person of both subject and object, and not on animacy or definiteness. In other words, the conditioning of Jivaroan object marking is entirely based on referential properties and not discourse properties.

It is possible to motivate the distribution of accusative marking in Shiwiar using the abstract hierarchical approach that has been applied to other cases of DOM. However, in this talk we will argue that no insights can be gained by using an abstract hierarchical analysis, and that in cases like these the data should be taken at face value.

References

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- Overall, Simon E. 2007. *A grammar of Aguaruna*. PhD dissertation, RCLT La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia.
- Witzlack-Makarevich, A. 2011. 'Typological variation in grammatical relations' PhD dissertation, Universität Leipzig, Germany